



Vets suffer more health problems: study

Wednesday Oct 19 19:35 AEST

Korean War veterans are more likely to suffer a wide range of health problems, post-traumatic stress disorder or to smoke or drink to excess, a new study reveals.

The final section of a three-part health study found those who saw action were up to three times more likely to suffer from heart, liver and kidney diseases, diabetes, skin cancers and partial or complete blindness and deafness than men who stayed in Australia.

Veterans Affairs Minister De-Anne Kelly said the study was a major investigation of health in the Australian veteran population and one of the most comprehensive studies ever conducted on a specific veteran group.

More than 17,000 Australian soldiers, sailors and airmen served in the Korean conflict which started in July 1950 when North Korean forces invaded the South. It ended in 1953.

In all, 339 Australians died and another 1,216 were wounded.

It was fought in a climate of dust, heat and bitter cold and sometimes in conditions reminiscent of the Western Front of World War I. It is the only conflict since World War II in which Australians (29 of them) were taken prisoner.

President of the Korean War Australian Recognition Committee Bob Morris welcomed the release of the study, saying it highlighted what Australian defense personnel had gone through.

Mr. Morris, who served in the Royal Australian Navy aboard HMAS Tobruk between 1951 and 1954, said less than 40 per cent of the Australians who served in the Korean War were still alive.

He said he had suffered many health problems since the war, including heart and liver conditions.

"I drank very heavily, I smoked very heavily," he said.

"I got myself out of that now but it certainly took its toll on all of us.

"I know a lot of people my age who haven't had the health problems I've had because the conditions were very, very harsh (in Korea)."

In the study, the health of 7,525 Korean veterans was compared against 2,964 men of comparable age who stayed in Australia. Participants ranged in age from 66 to 99.

The study was commissioned by the Department of Veterans Affairs and conducted by Monash University, starting in March last year.

It follows the Korean War veteran's mortality and cancer incidence studies.

"Overall, the results of the study showed that surviving Australian Korean War veterans, approximately five decades after the Korean War, are experiencing significant excesses in several measures of psychological ill health, lower life satisfaction and poorer quality of life, and excess medical conditions and hospitalizations compared with a group of similarly aged Australian men who were residing in Australia at the time of the Korean War," it said.

The study found that a third of veterans met the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder.

Only 18 per cent of veterans said they were happy with the way their lives had turned out, compared with 40 per cent of non-veterans.

The veterans were up to three times more likely to suffer from 15 specific medical conditions, including asthma, high blood pressure, heart, kidney, liver and stomach problems as well as blindness or deafness.

Many veterans also reported lifetime patterns of alcohol and cigarette consumption. Seventy-nine per cent said they were current or former smokers compared with 60 per cent of the comparison group.

The veterans also were three times more likely to meet criteria for a history of alcohol related problems.

The study found the rate of psychological problems was as much as 15 times higher for those who experienced heavy combat.